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# INTERESPAÇO

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### MATERIALISM, IDEALISM AND THE ONTO- EPISTEMOLOGICAL ROOTS OF GEOGRAPHY\*

#### MATERIALISMO, IDEALISMO E AS RAÍZES ONTO-EPISTEMOLÓGICAS DA GEOGRAFIA

#### MATERIALISMO, IDEALISMO E LAS RAÍCES ONTO-EPISTEMOLÓGICAS DE LA GEOGRAFÍA

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#### ABSTRACT

The present article has as proposal the discussion of the philosophical categories of *Idealism* and *Materialism* in the Geographical thought. Starting from the assumption that the knowledge is a *fact*, we explicit our onto-epistemological basis by a dialog between the main representatives of each Philosophy pole, from Democritus to Hegel, exposing after the sublation to the metaphysics done by the dialectical materialism. Using a bridge to the hard core of the Critical Geography (Lefebvre, Harvey and Quaini), we transmute the philosophical debate to the geographical field showing the often ignored roots, logic and addictions of the Modern Geography. Retaking in the end the duel between *Idealism* and *Materialism*, we present our thesis in which the *Crisis* of Geography is, in fact, just the result of a *process* originated from its incapacity as a discipline to *overcome* the limiter vestige of its birth: the Metaphysics.

**Keywords:** Philosophy of Geography; Lefebvre; Historical Materialism; Geography's Crisis.

#### RESUMO

O presente artigo tem como proposta a discussão das categorias filosóficas de *idealismo* e *materialismo* no pensamento Geográfico. Partindo do pressuposto de que o conhecimento é um *fato*, explicitamos a nossa base onto-epistemológica por meio de um diálogo entre os principais representantes de cada polo da Filosofia, de Demócrito à Hegel, expondo logo após a suprassunção à metafísica realizada pelo materialismo dialético. Pela ponte com o núcleo duro da Geografia Crítica (Lefebvre, Harvey e Quaini), transmutamos o debate filosófico para o campo geográfico ao mostrar as tão ignoradas raízes, lógica e vícios da Geografia Moderna. Retomando ao fim o duelo entre *idealismo* e *materialismo*, apresentamos nossa tese de que a *Crise* da Geografia é, na verdade, apenas o resultado de um *processo* oriundo de sua incapacidade como disciplina de *superar* o resquício limitador de seu berço: a Metafísica.

**Palavras-chave:** Filosofia da Geografia; Lefebvre; Materialismo Dialético; Crise da Geografia.

#### RESUMEN

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En este artículo se propone la discusión de las categorías filosóficas del idealismo y el materialismo en el pensamiento geográfico. En la hipótesis de que el conocimiento es un hecho, aclaramos nuestra base ontológica y epistemológica por medio de un diálogo entre los principales representantes de cada polo de la filosofía, Demócrito hasta Hegel, lo que sigue la supresión hacia la metafísica realizada por el materialismo dialéctico. Considerando los autores claves en la Geografía Crítica (Lefebvre, Harvey e Quaini), ubicamos el debate filosófico hacia el campo geográfico para indicar las raíces, por supuesto ignoradas, la lógica y los vicios de la Moderna Geografía. Pronto la retomada en el fin del artículo entre idealismo y materialismo, enseñaremos nuestra tesis de que la crisis de la Geografía es, en verdad, solamente el resultado de un proceso oriundo de su incapacidad, cómo disciplina, en superar el vestigio limitador de su cuna: la Metafísica.

**Palabras clave:** Filosofía de la Geografía; Lefebvre; Materialismo Dialéctico; Crisis de la Geografía.

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## INTRODUCTION

The dispute between Idealism and Materialism is one of the most fascinating of Philosophy. Permeating it since its origin, the Idealism-Materialism dichotomy is present in any attempt by Man to interpret Reality, be it in the field of Ontology, or in the subsequent Epistemology. Historically situated, the struggle between Being and Thought followed proportional intensity to the gradual rise of Modern Science, reaching its paroxysm with Hegel, Feuerbach, Marx and Engels, in the late Enlightenment of the Second Industrial Revolution. Although the debate is still present to this date, it's a fact that both the artificial rupture between Philosophy and Science- initiated in the early 20th Century- and the irrationalism of the imputative hermeneutics advocated by post-structuralism- emerging as of 1960-, allocated the ontological questions to an *apparent* second-round domain. In any form, the inevitable grounding (conscious or –more commonly- *unconsciously*) of scientific or philosophical propositions under *one* of the two poles of the Ontology results in consequences not only *abstract*, but, on the contrary, also *objectives*.

As such, to apprehend the nuances of this dialectical, but dichotomous historical duel is to comprehend, consequently, not only the development of Geography, but of the *human knowledge itself*.

Assuming as a premise the Marxian ontology's fundamental postulate –that is, knowledge is a *fact* (being it historical, social and practical), we use as ontological principles of philosophical analysis the Dialectical Materialism, contained both in the *Formal Logic*, *Dialectical Logic* and *Materialism and Empiriocriticism*, from Lefebvre (1991) and Lenin (1946), respectively. Migrating to the field of Geography, we take the Critical Geography from Harvey (2000) and Quaini (1979) as common ground for the transposal of the Materialism and Idealism debate.

It is demonstrated at the end how the Vulgar Materialism and Idealism's inherent Metaphysics, through its false dichotomies between Subject and Object, Spirit and Body and, specially, Nature and Man, shaped Geography to its intricate actual state.

Since the contact between Philosophy and Geography is compromised for a long time (QUAINI, 1979, p. 25-26), we judge the preliminary attempt to reestablish it as the relevancy of this work.

## METAPHYSICS AND IDEALISM

According to Lefebvre, the metaphysical 'method' consists, briefly, in dividing, tearing what is whole and one, creating concepts artificially separated and displaced from Reality (1991, p. 53). The metaphysical Epistemology has as basis, therefore, the division of Subject and Object. Detaching the Self from Nature is to fall in the already warned mistake by Spinoza, that "there is no Empire inside an Empire" (SPINOZA, 2002, p. 551), with results that are grave not only inside the field of Geography, rupturing the metabolic relation between Being and the Natural, as in every ontological systems that derives from that basis.

The Metaphysics, in a nutshell: consists always in theory disconnected from practice; it is an individual doctrine, that disregards actual systems of mutual relation of parts, where the metaphysical is closed in itself, with its theory cyclical and isolated (complete or partially) in relation to Reality; it is anti-historical, ignoring both *time* and processuality of Man or Nature; and lastly, slows down or completely stops the progress of knowledge, since it sees *attainable finalism* in the process of human knowing, leaning: or to the supremacy of Thought in relation to the Natural, where Truth is only obtainable by beginning and ending in the Subject; or in the exact contrary, going to *determinism*, transforming us in automata subordinate to the physiological and natural environment, this being the majority pattern of 19th's Century Geography. The knowledge's *naturalness*, retroactive experience of Man with Nature is seen by the metaphysical as a *problem*.

Metaphysics is present in both sides of Philosophy's most prominent debate: be it in Idealism, or Materialism. However, the metaphysical thought, historically, had predominant exposition through idealist philosophical systems. Idealism, for Lefebvre, is defined as "the doctrines that elevate a part of the acquired knowledge to the absolute, making of such part an mysterious idea or thought that, according to them, existed before nature or real man" (1991, p. 53, emphasis added).

As such, it's derived that all Idealism is, necessarily, metaphysical, since it always separate what is whole. Yet, the reciprocal is not true, given the existence of Metaphysical Materialism –seen in detail above-, that advocates the same rupture of Thought and Being but with inverted signals, as it infers the absolute submission of Thought to the naturalist physiology.

What explains Idealism's predominance as a philosophical current for almost two millennia is the social division of labor (LEFEBVRE, 1991, p.59). Occurring in the earliest of times, already in Ancient Greece and increasing ever since, the division led the Human Being, that *naturally* builds your knowledge (and yourself) by the constant interaction with the Natural, to have its epistemic *leitmotif* changed by the Intellectual's class (philosophers, mathematicians, etc.)- themselves a product of the division of labor. As such, with the creation of some social extracts focused on manual labor and others in the intellectual one, the absolute rupture of the ones who *think* with the *concrete that surrounds them* was a fertile soil to the hegemony of the idealist current since remote times, where the priority, as expected, gone to the Subject, and *not* the Object<sup>1</sup>-the last being seen with despise, as it was handled mostly by the socially inferior classes. Consequently, the common sense that Being existed *exterior and independent* of me –incorporated by the general population- is inverted, transformed in its exact opposite: the Being is *subordinated* to the Thought.

Therefore the idealist, in addition to his innate metaphysics, considers the *spirit* as the primordial element of Reality. His ecstasy, addiction and argumentative fundament consists in the “*inversion of the real process of knowledge*”<sup>2</sup>. Processual, dialectical and progressive by essence, knowledge is gradual, result of the constant interaction (and elevation) of Man in relation to Nature. But, in considering knowledge as previous to the concrete world, Idealism inverts then the real epistemic process: from gradual, to fixed; from dialectical, to formalized and stratified.

## THE IDEALISM AND ITS FORMS

“Nothing exists in understanding that does not derive from the senses, other than understanding itself, *nise ipse intellectus*”<sup>3</sup> (LEIBNIZ, 2010, p. 35). The Leibnizian maximum perfectly represents the Idealism from the 17-19th centuries. A great influence of Kant, Leibniz affirms, succinctly, that everything arises from experience with the world. But at

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<sup>1</sup> Such division had one of its first appearances in Ancient Greece, in the slavery system of the Polis.

<sup>2</sup> LEFEBVRE, 1991, p. 58.

<sup>3</sup> Except the intellect itself.

the same time, nothing arises: we see here the *understanding* elevated to the Absolute, in a form that it, completely removed from experience or Reality, transforms itself in the pillar of ontology's submission to Idea.

Kant, its successor, improved his system. Kantian Transcendental Idealism considers that scientific truths (i.e., knowledge derived from the interaction of thought and its logical instruments with the natural) had restricted range. Through concrete world's representations to our sensible intuition (our senses)- the phenomena- and only from them would be possible, by utilizing the Categories of Understanding, arrive to Knowledge (REALE and ANTISIERI, 2005, p. 352-355). However, given that sensible intuition is restrict to the concrete world, every concept unrelated to it is inapprehensible, being possible to exist or not. These would be the controversial "things-in-itself" (or noumenon), the boundary zone of our epistemic incursion (LEFEBVRE, 1991, p.220). If the division noumenon/phenomena is something intern to the material object, being only an epistemological division, or if it happens in a metaphysical level, where Nature's constitution would be only phenomenal, being, if real, the noumena apart from the Universe, it's a question of intense debate.

What matters to our analysis however is to stress out that, although Kant did considered certain *progressive* conception of knowledge, where, in refining human understanding (approximating it to the Transcendental Deduction), we could comprehend more and more the phenomena, his Ontology and Epistemology falls into the unavoidable errors of the idealist Metaphysics. Postulating, following Leibniz, that the Understanding is unrelated to experience, being something innate and *incomprehensible* to Man, there is the banal elevation of it to the category of Absolute (*nise ipse intellectus*), from where follows the subsequent subordination of the Ontology to the Subject, this being the active agent in relation to the *passive* Nature. In the epistemological field, the recurrent idealist's inaccuracy about the inversion of the process of knowledge occurs: The Truth about Reality and its internal logic would be majorly finished by the Science of his period (LEFEBVRE, 1991, p. 93), with Newtonian Physics and Euclidian Mathematics being, for Kant, the perfect examples of final synthesis in the areas of Physics and Mathematics, respectively. Experience, in the other hand, would only be an appendix of knowledge, given that the basic notion of all Nature's structure (i.e., its laws) would already be *initially present* in the human mind, albeit in the form of *a priori* knowledge derived from Metaphysics. Experience's function would be then to elevate from a state of *potentiality* the innate knowledge mentioned above, putting it at clear sights.

The conclusion is dual: knowledge, as a *fact* derived from the constant interaction between Man and Nature, is ignored, being allocated as something ultimately independent, displaced from Reality. As such, causality is replaced by tautology<sup>4</sup>, with the difference that in the Kantian system God as a final cause becomes *occult*<sup>5</sup>. Besides, the negation of time takes away the infinite historicity of knowing, allocating it to the artificial synchrony that knowledge has an *end*, being passible of eternal categorization after an final synthesis (see ENGELS, 2015, p. 68 and 118-119).

Not unexpectedly, the cast in stone epistemological premises of Transcendental Idealism collapsed by self-sabotage when, not even fifty years after the author's death, the 'perfection' of Classical Mathematics and Newtonian Physics were undermined by both the discoveries of Riemann - that lead to the Non-Euclidian Geometry- and Plank and Einstein- culminating later in Quantum Mechanics and General Relativity.

In contrast, the conviction seen in the Kantian Epistemology, sometimes higher, sometimes smaller, in the efficiency of the instruments of thought to enhance the approximation to the Truth is, mostly, what differentiates - amongst idealists- *objectives* ones from the *subjectives*.

Accordingly, Objective Idealism is defined, for Lefebvre, as the philosophical currents that give certain value to our methods and instruments of knowledge, giving validity, although partial, to the knowledge derived from human understanding<sup>6</sup>. Kant, Leibniz, Hegel, Descartes and the vast majority of philosophers of the idealist tradition belong to this current. Subjective Idealism, conversely, is characterized by the total disbelief in the human capacity to attain Truth, having as *motto* that every 'knowledge' is merely an artificial construct, specific subjectivism of the individual interpretation.

Classical example and maybe the most radical subjective idealist would be Berkeley. Denying completely the *existence in itself* of the sensible world, the philosopher's Idealism is the result of the most acute bestial division realized by Metaphysics. Far from just recognizing, - as the traditional metaphysicians- that Subject and Object are fundamentally opposite and irreconcilable, Berkeley *completely denies* the Object, inferring that every part of concrete Reality is a result of the mind, and only from it (LEFEBVRE, 1991, p. 246). In

<sup>4</sup> In Logic, that which is true under any interpretation, an obviousness.

<sup>5</sup> Reintroduced, contradicting his Antinomies of Pure Reason, in the *Critical of the Practice Reason* under the format of the Categorical Imperative.

<sup>6</sup> LEFEBVRE, 1991, p. 54.



this way, matter and the world would be a mere simulacrum produced by our thoughts, with even the sensible existence of other humans being close to a delirium<sup>7</sup>.

As we will see soon, there is convergence, although contingent, between objective idealists and materialists concerning the “problem” of knowledge.

## OBJECTIVE IDEALISM AND ITS IMPORTANCE

Rule out something, completely or partially, only because its author belongs or not to the idealist current would be at the very least paradoxical in face of our attempt to approach Philosophy in a dialectical way. The sublation (*Aufhebung*) has as basis the objective, rational elimination of the contradictory and insufficient portion of the facts, incorporating, then, each and every benefit or accuracy belonging to a system of ideas.

Since ‘Materialism’ isn’t a synonym for Science or Truth, the contrary is valid as well to Idealism. Indeed, “actually, and very much on the contrary, the idealist “systems” were frequently much more rich, complex and filled with life content in comparison to the materialist doctrines. The most penetrating instruments of knowledge were forged by idealists, in the heart of idealist doctrines” (LEFEBVRE, 1991).

By way of example, it would be opportune to briefly cite a concrete case. Descartes, as a *scientist*, took a completely materialist posture, with invaluable discoveries in the fields of refraction, physiology, algebra and analytical geometry. As a philosopher, he inferred the basis of his Ontology in the substance theory, clearly dividing his *res extensa* (everything that has extension; the concrete) from the *res cogitans* (dimension of thought; Spirit). Metaphysical by essence, in allocating all of his scientific contribution to the theological figure of *God*, Descartes incorporates an unmistakably idealist posture. However, this doesn’t change the *scope* of his contribution to Knowledge, much higher and relevant than, for instance, his most irresolute contemporary critics, such as the firmly *materialist* Pierre Gassendi. Although correct in every objection postulated against the Cartesian Dualism from the *Meditations*, he didn’t achieve the same scientific relevancy as his rival.

Consequently, since Knowledge *cannot stop developing* even inside idealist systems, we just reaffirm the Hegel and Marx’s maximum, where Man develops even through his *alienation*. Therefore, without never abandoning a critical perspective in relation to Idealism - falling as such in the error of eclecticism- the dialectical materialist approach in some way

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<sup>7</sup> There is a psychiatric picture called “Solipsism Syndrome”. In it, the patient, generally as a response to long periods of detach ent, feels that the external world is just a product of his own mind. It’s clear the almost *pathological* level of extreme metaphysics.

*rehabilitate* it, transforming it from absolute falsity to relative falsity. Its content is then *integrated* by the junction between Objective Idealism and in-depth Materialism, overcoming, therefore, any unilaterality.

Lenin, in his *Materialism and Empiriocriticism* (influenced by the *Anti-Dühring* of Friedrich Engels), exposes in a clear way the principle of sublation in the ideas:

Idealism, in the philosophical sense of the term, is foolishness only from the point of view of a crude, superficial, metaphysical Materialism. On the contrary, from the point of view of Materialism the disciplined by Dialectics, the philosophical Idealism is an unilateral growth, an excrescence, a superfetation, one of the traces or facets of knowledge, that ends up, by exaggeration, in the Absolute (...). Man's Knowledge isn't processed in a straight line, but in a curve one that perceptibly approximates the spiral (LENIN, 1946, Supplement to § 1 from Chapter IV).

## MATERIALISM AND ITS FORMS

In theoretical opposition to the idealist current, Materialism considers Nature as a primordial element of human's knowledge and ontology. Not allocating this role to the Spirit (or other kind of Absolute), philosophers of the materialist current have as a basic premise the fact the Nature *antecedes Man*, and not the other way around - as it's seen in traditional Idealism. The only philosophical property that defines Materialism is the fact that matter exists *outside* our consciousness, *before* us and *independent* to us (whatever this existence may be). In this way, it's expected that Materialism as a pure current - disassociated from any idealist vestige- be a rare fact until the advent of the scientific logic as such, in the 18th century.

Although impossible to trace a clear-cut division between both currents in our analysis of the History of Ideas (doing so would lead us to Vulgar Materialism, i.e., trying to force Reality's complexity inside some previous mold from abstract thought), we can clearly delimit *gradations* between both, in which past philosophers are *majorly* idealist or materialist. Moreover, demand that Democritus' Atomism in the 4th Century A.C., for instance, couldn't state the *erratum* that atoms are indivisible -like it did- in order to be classified as materialist is, at the bare minimum, utopian and not dialectical from our part: a fruit from vice the always at bay of anachronism. The classification of the Thought must be done, obviously, always in relation to the *historical correspondent period*.

The father and maybe oldest exponent of Materialism is, without any doubts, the above mentioned Democritus. Extremely influent over all thinkers with at least some interest in the objectivity of knowledge, the Greek thinker had as a core of his thought



Atomism, that allocated, in an unprecedented way, the causality of all Universe to something belonging to Nature: the indivisible -and independent from the Idea- Atom. This was the first and more influent trial of a materialist explanation of Ontology, i.e., of explaining the nature of Reality and Existence without appealing to Teleology<sup>8</sup>. Far away from the obvious consequences of Atomism, Democritus' Thought, together with the subsequent and disciple Epicurus, was crucial in the process of elevation of Man in relation to Nature.

Final epistemic objective in the thought of Democritus, the causality (*αἰτιολογία*) would be by him discovered. It would become the basis of Materialism: vulgar, or dialectical.

## METAPHYSICAL MATERIALISM, MODERN MATERIALISM

Merely inverting the idealist poles of supremacy of Subject to Object, the vulgar or metaphysical materialism elevates neither the Spirit nor Thought to the Absolute category: it does it with the very Nature. Denying in its extreme any possibility of free-choice, this mechanical allocation of causality to the Historical Being had effect, in practice, apologetic to the Bourgeois Society of the 19th Century. Through countless distortions of the Darwinian theory of Evolution it tried -by the crude transposition of method from Natural Sciences- the transformation of Society (and consequently of Man) in an object ruled by exact laws, obtained through empirical inductivism and with predictability equal to an Newtonian physical body. Any practical possibility of changing Reality was denied, direct or indirectly. Partially opposing Idealism, the Vulgar Materialism incorporated at the end its Teleology. The Social Physicists praised Lamarck and his vulgar orthogenesis<sup>9</sup>, thinking that in doing so they perfectly followed Darwin's Theory.

Be it in Morgan, Tylor, Ritter, Comte, Freud, Durkheim or even partially in Hegel, the positivist determinism showed its face being the *motto* of the 19th Century. The brutal response to Idealism happened -as expected by the historical period- just through changing signals in the current divorce between Nature and Man. Replacing the *divine* teleology by

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<sup>8</sup> Explanation of nature in terms of purpose, directive principle or final cause.

<sup>9</sup> Hypothesis in which life would have a *natural* propensity to evolve in a linear way, to a determined end. This 'biological teleology' guided metaphysical Materialism in the 19th Century.

the *natural* one, Vulgar Materialism kept intact the Metaphysics dominant in the last two centuries. From the Phenomenalism, into the Epiphenomenalism<sup>10</sup>:

Vulgar materialism answers denying the “I”, the conscious, human activity; dragging detail findings to the Absolute (for example, the reflexes), it gets out of the vicious circle of consciousness, but to renounce to consciousness, that, in his opinion, is still a vicious circle!” (LEFEBVRE, 1991, p. 66).

Insufficient and filled with problems, Vulgar Materialism was a start. Recognizing the historicity of knowledge and the *naturalness* of Man (firmly denying his mystical-theological origin), it, although apologetic to the Capitalist Social Order, was an utmost fact in contributing to the human processual apprehension of Reality.

Modern Materialism -or dialectical- *surpasses* the mechanicism exposed above, since it considers the vulgar opposition to Idealism as a mere duel between opposites *internal to Metaphysics*. It considers consciousness as real, *objective*, a reality that cannot be isolated from History, the organism and Nature, being it impossible to subordinate, by any absolute laws, to these characteristics. Inferring that Man is a product of Nature and at the same time *different* from it, dialectical materialism defines itself not by the superficial recognition of the mere existence of Mater, but by the *anteriority* of Being in relation to the Thought, fact which implies in the anteriority of Nature in relation to the Spirit, Body to Consciousness, of *content* to *form*. It overcomes Metaphysics, reconciling Nature and Man by a metabolic and indissoluble bond. The relations between the dialectical pairs are *not* a matter to the speculative Philosophy, but to scientific knowledge (LEFEBVRE, 1991, p. 87-88).

In his epistemological approach, Dialectical Materialism does not considers human perception as a perfect representation of Reality. On the contrary, there is recognition of the inconsistency between what is sensibly captured by thought, the form, and the essence of what is desired to learn, the content. But, in contrast from the idealist's proposition, this discrepancy doesn't imply in knowledge becoming intangible or allocated to some sort of transcendent realm. Knowledge is *objective*, a concrete fact. But the notion of *full* knowledge, absolute one, is indeed considered scholastic, since perpetuates under the aegis of the [false] Truth a portion of Reality, removing it from Time and ceasing any and every interaction of it with Nature. In doing so, we fall yet again in Metaphysics, where instantly the fraction of knowledge elevated transforms into falsity.

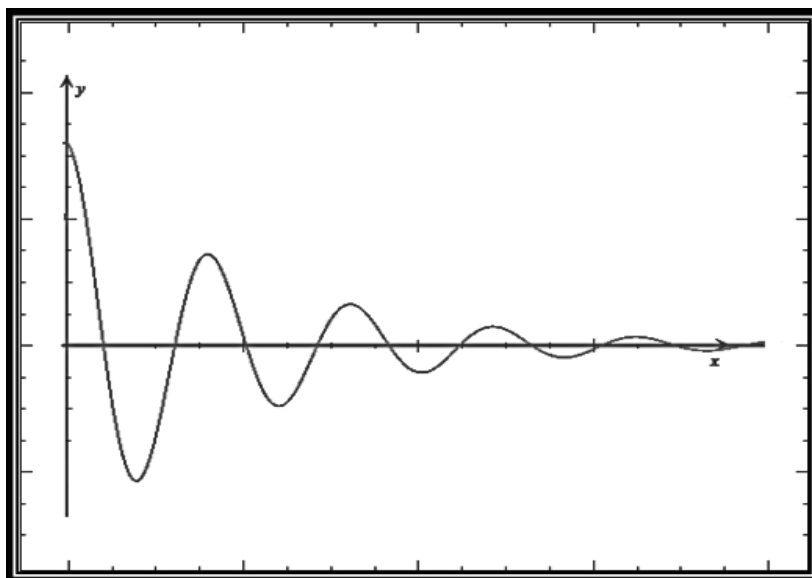
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<sup>10</sup> Philosophical vision that interprets thought, mind and human will as a causal consequence of physiological functions. Conscious would be irrelevant to human action, as we would act like *automata* following biochemical laws, without any chance of *actively* changing reality.

Accordingly, knowledge can only be forged, and *maintained*, by the constant and incessant interaction with Reality, of Subject with Object, without never ceding to the stagnation of models or self-contained theories. Never finding Reality in its totality, it, however, *crosses it* always momentarily, with frequency proportional to the progress and scientific accumulation. It surges by the contradictory dispute between opposites, by trial and error, by the *gradual, progressive and infinite* accumulation of the “*grains of truth*”. Setting off from ignorance and arriving through the historical process to Science, the key to knowledge is the same of the Reality that contains it: the *movement* (LEFEBVRE, p. 81, 163, 285).

In synthesis, dialectical materialist epistemology supposes: an Object, real matter progressively penetrated, and a Subject, being in which its perceptions in relation to the object correspond to it in a way *more or less* exact; that the Human Being is a subject-object, i.e., since he's as much mater as the Natural, he can analyze himself by equally scientific guidelines; Subject and Object, Thought and Matter, Spirit and Nature are at the same time *distinct*, however *connect*, fighting perpetually inside the Unity that they constitute. Infer about the relation of the pairs would be a job, as already said, to Science, and not speculation.

Finally, to clarify any uncertainties, a certain kind of symbolism can be useful. At a first look strange, Lenin's and Engels' idea that progress of knowledge *never* reaches Reality, being formed by the sum of *grains of truth* derived from relativity, approximation and even error, can be exemplified in a mathematical way. The dampened sinusoid's graph bellow is plotted from  $f(x) = a \cos \frac{x\pi}{\omega}$ , by the multiplication of  $f(x)$  by the damp factor  $e^{-mx}$ .



Source: LEFEBVRE, H. **Formal Logic, Dialectical Logic**. 1991, p. 285.

The curve would represent the past thought that, by approximations, relative errors and contingent contradictions would approximate Reality, reaching it only in the infinite. However, the intersection points of the curve in the abscissa axis represent the *grains of truth* that the thought intercepts in its movement. They would be, in a certain way, *part* of the Truth. Equally noteworthy is that the margin of error in the inferences -represented by the distance of the curve in relation to the X axis- reduces proportionally to the extension of  $f(x)$ . Therefore, with the passage of History, we tend to *increasingly* approximate Reality.

We have, by now, sufficient mastery over the historical duel intern to metaphysics between Idealism and Vulgar Materialism, as well of the position from Dialectical Materialism in relation to it. We can now analyze in what form this debate showed itself inside the core of the so-recent Geography, with all of its particularities.

## GEOGRAPHY AND PHILOSOPHY

Born inside German Idealism, Geography has an intimately close origin with philosophical thought. Inaugurated by Kant, going through Herder, Humboldt, Ritter, Hegel and Ratzel, all of Geography's basis showed up in the 19th Century and in the earlies 20th. Regardless to say the philosophical relevancy of names like Kant and Hegel, it's worthy to notice that Humboldt and Herder were, before anything else, philosophers too. Geography's origin has, as essence, the polemical debate contingent to Objective Idealism between Kant's Empiricism and the Hegelian Rationalism. As such, it's at least *curious* the present-state relation (or the *lack of it*) between the field of Philosophy and Geography.

Almost inexistent, the interaction between both areas, when occurs, is hostile. In a reactive manner to the almost absolute indifference of the philosophers to Geography, the geographers do worse, not only *reattributing* the attitude, but as well affirming in clear words the *uselessness* of the philosophical reflection, too much "abstract" for the nuances of Reality:

The majority of geographers theorize as little as possible and are pleased when saying, without any shame, that "Geography is a synthetic science" (...). Geographers doesn't hide their despire by the "abstract considerations" and transform it in a *merit*, declaring their preference by the "concrete" (LACOSTE apud QUAINI, 1979, p. 25).

Analyzing, therefore, the so called *Crisis* of Modern Geography -specially the appendices of the resulting "New" Geography, like the hegemonic Pragmatic Geography-

we come closer to the obvious conclusion that the problem's roots are deep. The lack of epistemological notion (without even touching the *ontological* one) is overwhelming, explaining, if not completely at least partially the distance and backwardness of Geography in relation to other Social and Natural Sciences. The poor mastery in the elaboration and use of the most basic logic-reflexive instruments explains why the geographical debate has for so much time just oscillated -like a pendulum- between *Determinism* and *Possibilism*.

We will try in the following pages elucidate, therefore, an *initial paradigm* to the comprehension of the Philosophy of Geography, anchoring ourselves in the already exposed categories of analysis of the philosophical thought worked by Lefebvre, Lenin and Engels.

### **KANT AND HUMBOLDT: the Kantian school**

Kant is considered the creator of Modern Geography. Not by chance, he was the first both to teach it as a discipline and to try to systemize it, being his course of *Geography* one of the most popular in the University of Königsberg. Differently from his Speculative Reason exposed in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, for Kant Geography would be part of the *Practical Reason*. Kantian geography doesn't exclude the human question. Seen as one of the two constituent parts of a whole, the knowledge of the world -*Weltkenntis*- was composed to Kant both by the Nature's knowledge (Geography, studying everything that was available to sensibility, i.e., Earth's surface) and the knowledge of Man (Anthropology). Initially the discipline of Anthropology was, therefore, an integral part of the Geography course.

The Metaphysics of Kantian Geography was acute. Far from being in equal level of relevancy, Nature would be *subordinated* to Men, in a way that his discipline of Anthropology would explain the questions *internal* to the Being, while Geography would analyze the *exterior* world. The subordination is seen in the clearly teleological argument of Kant, in which the cause itself of Nature's existence would be Men. The Human Being would be the end of Nature, and Nature would exist *for* Men (ELDEN, 2011, p. 6). The Space (seen as separated from Time, or History), being an *a priori*, would be studied by Reason only. Since Nature belongs and can only exist *per se* in Space, the final cause of every empirical analysis of nature or Man falls, inevitably, into the aprioristics instruments of thought from Man *himself*. The Study of Space by itself is not something seen as attainable by the empirical knowledge. Therefore, in an analogous way to the description of

his method above, the knowledge of Reality takes experience as a mere appendix, given that its epistemological fundament is something to the ultimate consequences unattainable by *Epistemology itself*: the human understanding. Besides, as it considered experience as *necessary* to flourish the already innate [in potentiality] *a priori* knowledge, when confronted to the other spectrum of German Idealism that we'll see shortly, the Hegelian, Kant approximates way more from the Empiricist field (undeniable influence of Hume) compared to the exacerbated Absolute Rationalism of the Historical-Method.

*A posteriori* -ergo-, Anthropology's and Geography's analysis would be done like any other science in the Kantian Philosophy. The trial of unifying knowledge -elevating it to the Universal Categorization- shows the ambitious, ahistorical and cosmopolitan Kantian project with the *Weltkenntis*: the appropriate geographical and anthropological knowledge would provide every necessary condition to the practical knowledge of the whole World (HARVEY, 2000, p. 3).

Going beyond, however, its theoretical content, we see the undeniable influence of Montesquieu's geographical determinism in his *Course*. Resisting the error of anachronism, is nonetheless notable the prejudice scope of his texts in relation to other people. Foreseeing Linear Evolutionism -having at least surpassed polygenism<sup>11</sup>-, the content of Kant's affirmations is exemplified, without the need to further explanations, in his *Notes* (the guide to his Geography's course):

In hot climates the man matures more rapidly in every aspect, but they do not reach the perfection of the temperate zones. Humanity reaches its biggest perfection with the White Race. The Yellow Indians have, in a way, less talent. Negros are much more inferior, and some peoples of the Americas are much below them (KANT, 1999, apud HARVEY, 2000, p. 4).

Finally, not only the notion exposed above is contradictory with his philosophical *cosmopolitanism*. The deficient bridge between his theoretical thought and practical reason in Geography is seen as well in his methodological principles. Trying to elevate the field of Geography not only to Science, but as the Science of all Earth's Nature, his systematical apprehension method of the physical characteristics of Earth is lacking. Seeking as an end the discovery of general laws, Kant proposed that the study of the terrain, soil, fauna and flora should be done only in a *regional* manner. The inference about Laws would first be valid only locally. But Kant doesn't says clearly how to make the leap from the Particular to the Universal, even inquiring in a frustrated manner if the discovery of causality in a small

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<sup>11</sup> Pre-evolutionist conception that considered all the non-white human races as *animals*, displaced -and inferior- to the *Homo Sapiens*.



scale would be possible: “the organization of Nature have nothing of analogous to any causality known to us” (KANT, 1999 apud HARVEY, 2000, p. 5).

Kant’s writings about Geography didn’t have a late influence. Profound students of Kantian Philosophy, the Humboldt brothers had vestiges of the Transcendental Idealist method in almost all of their work. Alexander Von Humboldt, the youngest brother, undertook the most glorious and colossal trial of utilizing Kant’s conception about the geographical knowledge. Through constant regional experimentation, searching for an absolute and integrated synthesis of understanding of Nature, he wrote his *Kosmos* (1845), an encyclopedic catalog of all knowledge collect in his voyages across the world as a Naturalist. His quantitative findings practically created biogeography, with his idea of long term geophysical measurement laying the basis of Meteorology and geomagnetical monitoring.

Humboldt managed to *transcend* and systemize in a notable manner the Kantian inferences about the study of Nature, these being chaotic and often conflicting. A true product of the Late Renaissance (2000, p.18), Alexander managed, through his passion and encyclopedism, to unify Humanism with Geography, reaching maybe even more closer to the cosmopolitanism than Kant himself. Obviously, Humboldt was not exempt from the historical eurocentrism at the time, period which, for the most part, proved itself to be the grave of his stillbirth *Kosmos*. Over the 19th Century, the partition of disciplines in Universities reached its peak. Given the necessity of rapidly meet the demand of States immersed in Imperialism, only the knowledge collected and utilized in administrative purposes, in either State or Industry, were accepted into institutionalization. Therefore, the visionary work of Humboldt was discarded before it was even completed, *curiously* buried by the same Education guidelines forged by his older brother Wilhelm, the creator of the University of Berlin. Geography abandons forcedly, then, its interdisciplinary, unifying and totalizing prototype project.

But, not only by historical fatalities was Humboldt’s work buried. Assuming the Objective Idealism of Kant, Alexander accepted the premise of metaphysical separation between Time and Space. Thus, showing little to no interest by the *dynamic* of Reality, he affirmed without hesitation that the not solved mysteries of the *development* (Human or Natural) were not part of the empirical-scientific observation. Only Reality’s the present state (synonymous of *final*) could be analyzed. Homologous error to the Kantian vulgate in the fields of Physics and Mathematics, the indifference towards processuality and Time was concealed by Darwin, with his *Origin of Species*. From then on -and by a long time as we will

see-, evolution and the notion of process gained precedence over form and pattern (2000, p. 19).

Lastly, the *Kantian Method*, represented by Kant and refined by Humboldt, stood limited to its ontological basis: the Transcendental Idealism. Its Metaphysics, clearly seen in the division of Reason and Experience, Nature and History, Subject and Object, Space and Time, transforms in pure mechanicism the Man and Environment relation, obfuscating Alexander's project of geographical encyclopedism. More a practical man than a theoretical one, Humboldt would see his antithesis in the equally German Ritter, with which he divides hitherto the founder of Geography position.

Therefore, the maximum addiction of the *absolute synthesis* of Reality -both by negation or vulgar incorporation of the *process*- took Geography sometimes to the "causal" geographical determinism, sometimes to the semi-theological. Teleonomy<sup>12</sup> permeated the debate of 19th Century. With Hegel, Idealism achieved the incorporation of *time* in its geographical way of thinking, utilizing itself from the Ritterian Conception; however, little in fact changed from its ontological basis.

## RITTER, HEGEL AND THE HISTORICAL METHOD

Carl Ritter was a theoretical. An anachronistic vestige of German Romanticism, Ritter was before anything else a Philosopher and a Historian, having as natural habitat a University chair, and not the dangerous and uncomfortable expeditions across the New World. Not only in spirit, Ritter was opposed to Humboldt also in *method*. The initial explanation of this discrepancy is in his conception about Geography: far from the universalizing perspective of the Kantian Method, Ritter's the *Comparative Method* perceived the object of Geography as the description of *regions*. By the thorough gathering of details about the landscape (concept of which he came very close to define) -what he considered the indissoluble central element of the Geographical Science- the objective of his method was the precise categorization of Earth in regions with intrinsic sources of *coherence*. Such regions would form latter the more elevated degree of continents' categorization.

His *Magnum Opus*, "*Die Erdkunde*" (literal translation from German as "Geography") or "*The Comparative Method*", was a colossal work of more than twenty thousand pages, in which Ritter tried to describe and categorize all of the global terrain through traveler's

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<sup>12</sup> Teleology applied to live matter; search of finality in the biological field.

reports. Filled with a vulgar providentialism<sup>13</sup>, in it Man is considered as a “maximum work” of the “Creator”, being Earth merely His “theater of historical development” and the fauna and flora our teleological appendixes. What interests us, however, is the innovative approach in his description of landscape. Far from just topographical or physical, the landscape of a particular ambient is characterized by climate, vegetation, animals and, *finally*, the Man and his *historical relation* with the natural elements. Advocating that Geography should comprehend not only *how* Man influences the space where he lives, but, how he is influenced *by it*, Ritter is a pioneer in the historical analysis of regions. In doing so, his objective was to locate the period of its higher population development, as in it, he believed -and here with no doubts influenced by Linear Evolutionism- was where the most acute *harmony* between Culture and Nature occurred. Therefore, his Comparative Method not only would categorize the World, but study as well the *History* of the particular regions. In this way, it is by *historicity* that we observe the influence of the Comparative Method in the hegemonic philosopher of the 19th Century, beyond the point of opposition to Kant-Humboldt.

G. W. F. Hegel not only openly admired the *Erdkunde*, utilizing as well the topographical descriptions contained in it to fundament the way of expression of his *Welkegeist*, the “World’s Spirit”. Synonym of “History” for Hegel, the “*Weltgeist*” would express its totality through the particular “Spirit of the Peoples”, the *Volksgeist*, that, without contact with each other, would only have the Natural as support to development. Thus, the interaction between Spirit and Nature not only *makes itself* as would *be* the History itself. Such relation between Environment and Man would be ruled by the laws of *Dialectics*. This Unity would imply in visible problems in relation to the liberty of the Human Will:

Insofar as he is not free and is a natural element, Man affirms himself to be sensible- and the sensible is divided in two aspects, being the subjective naturalness and the exterior naturalness. That last is the geographical aspect, belonging to the exterior nature (...). What matters is not to know the soil as an extrinsic place, but the natural type of place that exactly coincides with the type and character of the people son to that soil (HEGEL, G. W. F. apud QUAINI, 1979, p. 31).

Therefore, without any doubts a revolutionary advance to the processual apprehension of Reality, the shallow Hegelian Geography was not exempt of problems. Ultimately, his Philosophy of History, although reconciling Subject with History, had as pillar a latent geographical determinism since, depending on the inhabited region by the *Volk*, his character, History and technical elevation in relation to Nature would be almost

<sup>13</sup> Idea that God is the true protagonist of History, being Man no more than His object of action.

an *a priori*, controllable only the abstraction of Idea. Curiously, on the other hand we see that the *ideal climate* to the development of the History's Spirit would be the tempered one, with the terrain identical to that of the Old World! The *Weltgeist* Dialectics transmutes itself in the ethnocentric history of the Ideal Society: The one of the Bourgeoisie.

The debate contingent to Objective Idealism results therefore in the specific oblivion of Kant and Humboldt. The Epistemology that was most able to align itself to the interests of the State was the one that gained *hegemony* in the Institutions. Although still ontologically restrict to the irreparable Absolute, the Historic Method in Geography showed itself as the system of ideas most fit -by a short period of time- to the historical necessities of the Capital. Still necessary to the *civilizing* justification for the widening of markets, now the Imperialist expansion faced the necessity of *objective* explanation of Reality -something that Hegel's Transcendental Dialectics hadn't a good proficiency, given its philosophical roots.

The answer would arrive not only in another method, but by other *ontology*. The struggle by the ideological supremacy in Geography would now be taken off Idealism, remaining, on the other hand, still in the *safe* Metaphysics.

### **METAPHYSICAL MATERIALISM: between Possibilism and Determinism**

The predominance of Metaphysical Materialism in Geography begins with Ratzel, surviving to the Renovation of Geography and still finding shelter today under the Pragmatic Geography. Of extensive particularities to this work, the process above can be synthesized in the '*Renovation*' not of Geography, but of Positivism. Going through the orthogenetic vulgate of the Ratzelian "Organic State" to the geographical Synchronic Possibilism of La Blache, finally peaking in the Pragmatic Neopositivism, Metaphysics maintains itself as the ontological basis of Geography.

Certainly an advance, the rupture with Idealism occurred partially, being completed only by the minority Critical Geography. The separation between Man and Environment is not only catastrophic, but *necessary* to the Capitalist fetishism, that sees in Nature nor History, nor Dialectics: only passive Object. This results in the transformation of Geography as a mere political-economic *instrument* of a class, a law just brought up-to-date in by "Quantitative Revolution" in the Modern World. The bloody and historical 'methodological' debates of Geography prove themselves as majorly fruitless, since they express the complete misunderstanding of the *ontological* root of the problem:

Geography still reveals to this date a dualist soul: it oscillates, continues to oscillate between Determinism and Possibilism, Naturalism and Idealist Historicism, between an materialist causality and indeterminate Finalism (...) i.e., from one side, there is a tendency to consider Reality as only the necessity or the material causality, from the other, Reality is considered as only Finalism or Liberty of the Human Action. These are two solutions that doesn't solve the antinomy, but that perpetuate it, because it's normal that Idealism brings with itself (even in its context) its opposite (vulgar materialism), as well as Determinism, in its turn, evokes the absolute Indeterminism (QUAINI, 1979, p. 22).

## CONCLUSION

As exposed through this work, Geography was not able to sublimate the metaphysical arbitrariness of its birth. However before anything else, evading the immobilism of progress' negation -that being the post-Structuralist *motto*-, it's necessary to recognize the advance of the geographical thought. Never pending to the solipsist subjectivism, it managed to surpass the vulgar Teleology of Idealism and the Lamarckian Orthogenesis, actually in the end resulting in an important counter-hegemonic movement synthesized by Critical Geography.

Nevertheless, the result of the rupture between Man and Nature crystalized in a mere methodological debate *contingent* to Metaphysics. From Kantianism to Ritter and Hegel, Ratzel to La Blache, Quantitative Geography to Systemic, *all* the great debates of the hegemonic geographical thought oscillated only between Empiricism and Rationalism. The so called Quantitative *Revolution*, instead of answering in a resounding way to the *ontological* crisis of Geography, just upgraded Comte to the XX Century, introducing Neopositivism to the field.

The reconciliation between Man and Nature- neutralizing at last the false opposition between Subject and Object- is the central task to the full advance of Science. Such is the importance, if not total, at least partial of Modern Materialism, since it allocates Nature as the only totality and explains the World from the *World itself*. Geography, given its ambitious object of studies, has and will have a fundamental role in the infinite, but *objective* human apprehension of Reality, needing to, beforehand, bury definitely -and finally- the Metaphysics that surrounds it.

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